

PRESS RELEASE

Congressman John Conyers, Jr.

**Fourteenth District, Michigan
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary
Dean, Congressional Black Caucus**

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CONTACT:
Dena Graziano (202)226-6888

CONYERS, 100 PLUS DEMOCRATS TO FILE BRIEF SUPPORTING UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN'S ADMISSIONS POLICIES

Today, Congressman John Conyers, Jr., Ranking Member of the House Judiciary Committee and Dean of the Congressional Black Caucus, issued the following statement at today's press conference on the Amicus Brief filed by over 90 Members of the House supporting the University of Michigan's admissions policies:

"On April 1, 2003 the Supreme Court will hear oral arguments in the *Grutter v. Bollinger* and *Gratz v. Bollinger* cases, relating to the University's undergraduate and law school admission programs. This will be by far the most important civil rights case on higher education to be considered by the Supreme Court since *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* first upheld the notion of affirmative action in 1978.

Today, we stand on the threshold of a *Plessy v. Ferguson* moment; a time when the position of the Supreme Court can influence the movement of this nation toward the continuing commitment of full participation for all its citizens. Or the Court can abandon the progress of 30 years in the name of a distorted equal protection claim – one that is out of touch with the social reality of our nation.

As legislators who are charged with the duty to protect the access to public institutions and programs, especially public schools and institutions of higher education, for all citizens, we could not allow this Constitutional moment to pass without comment. I am, therefore, pleased to be joined by more than 100 colleagues in filing this amicus brief in support of the University of Michigan.

This response is all the more heartening, given the fact that our attempts to engage the majority – letters to Solicitor General Ted Olsen and Speaker Hastert – went without any response whatsoever.

While the *Bakke* decision proved a seismic shift in policy for colleges and universities, subsequent court ruling have created a climate of certainty and stability which has allowed legislatures to formulate programs that have resulted in unprecedented access and quality in higher education for all segments of society. Affirmative action in higher education is all the more important given that for the first time since the decision in *Brown*, our public schools are becoming increasingly segregated by race.

The most important social issue we face in this new century is how a highly diverse social people -- a people that will have no majority race by the middle of the century -- can coexist and prosper together. Our diversity should be seen as our strength, not weakness. If we fall victim to backward-looking 19th Century legalistic formulas that result in the de facto segregation of American life, we will all be the worse for it."

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